

God's Initiative in You



PART TWO

November 14, 1998

Thrust Statement: We are to work out this amazing salvation God has given us with awe.

Scripture Reading: [Philippians 2:12-13](#)

Does Paul teach that one earns his or her own salvation? Is salvation by works? Or is salvation by grace? Just what is Paul exhorting the Philippians to do? Does "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" ([Philippians 2:12](#)) contradict what Paul says to Titus?

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life ([Titus 2:4-7](#)).

Paul speaks of working out one's salvation in [Philippians 2:12](#), but in [Titus 2](#), he is speaking, not of working out your own salvation, but rather, of God's initiative in our salvation. Salvation is something they already possess through God's mercy. Even though one is saved by grace, nevertheless, Paul does not discount "good works" as necessary for the believer? No! Good works are things God ordained before the foundation of the world. Paul

goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**Ephesians 2:10**). Prior to this call to the Ephesians for "good works," Paul clearly advances salvation by God's grace. Again, he goes right to the root of redemption:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (**Ephesians 2:4-9**).

Let us return to Paul's letter to Titus. In this letter, Paul forcefully draws attention to good works following one's salvation by the grace of God:

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**Titus 3:8**).

Also, Paul, in writing to the Philippians, cannot make a practical appeal to good works without first putting it in terms of doctrine. In other words, he sets forth the scheme of redemption, and, then, he calls for conduct that will glorify God. Prior to his encouraging the Philippians to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (**Philippians 2:12**), he says, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (**Philippians 1:27**). This reflection upon God's activity in our salvation is Paul's characteristic way of making an appeal for conduct and ethical behavior.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 1:11-15**).

It is not uncommon for Paul to lay down "grace" first, and then say, "If you believe this, then, cannot you see that this redemption inevitably necessitates a change in one's life style. He does not confront us with a way of life, and then say, "Go and live it." But rather, Paul tells us about the things that have been done for us, and then says, "Now then—go and live it." As you make this transition from doctrine, that is to say, the good news about salvation in Jesus, there is always a "therefore" (**Philippians 2:12**). There is a logical sequence from doctrine to behavior. Every believer must take up his cross and follow Jesus daily (**Matthew 16:24**).

What does it mean to "work out your salvation" (**Philippians 2:12**)? Before one can work out his or her own salvation, then, that person must see his or her own sinfulness and be

conscious of his or her need of divine help. The Philippians, too, realized that they were sinners saved by grace. They also were conscious that at one time they were under the wrath of God; they were aware that at one time they were under the dominion of sin; they were mindful that at one time they were under the curse of the law; and they were cognizant that at one time they were under condemnation. They knew that at one time they were guilty in the sight of God. They had heard and believed the good news of the gospel—that God had sent His only begotten Son to die in order to make atonement for them. Now it is time to produce fruit worthy of repentance.

"Working out your salvation" simply means that one is to perfect, to bring to pass, and to lead a life that results in "good works"—works that please God. One must now perfect the salvation given to him or her through faith in Jesus. Just as John the Baptizer exhorted the religious leaders to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" ([Matthew 3:8](#)), so must every believer work out his or her own salvation with awe and reverence. One must submit himself or herself entirely to God. What kind of works or fruit is involved in the works that Paul speaks of in the Philippian letter. To begin with, let us reflect upon the words of Jesus in the healing of a man born blind:

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned,"** said Jesus, **"but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world"** ([John 9:1-5](#)).

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, sets forth the necessity of good works. In calling attention to fruit production in their lives, he also informed his disciples that they too were the lights of the world. It appears that *works* and *light* go together. Jesus proclaims ethical behavior for his followers:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)).

Again, as John records, Jesus speaks of working for the food that endures for eternal life:

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, **"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent"** ([John 6:27-29](#)).

To believe on the One whom God sent is to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling. What Paul told the Philippians to do concerning kingdom behavior is also set forth in his letter to the Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

How does one present his body a living sacrifice? Is it through rituals or through ethical behavior? Is it through producing good fruit in one's way of life? Immediately upon calling upon the Roman Christians to present their bodies a living sacrifice, Paul catalogues a number of characteristics that exemplify Christ in their lives:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (**Romans 12:9-21**).

This is what it means to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. We have been given a new start; we have been given a new nature. Salvation is set before us. We need to read the Word of God; we need to pray; we need to share salvation; we need to proclaim redemption. Just as David, the psalmist, expresses his gratitude for God's kindness, so must every believer allow gratefulness on his or her lips. David exclaims:

I desire to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.
I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and salvation.
I do not conceal your love and your truth
from the great assembly (**Psalms 40:8-10**).

The believer loves the Word, lives the Word, and preaches the Word. Do you desire to do the will of God? Do you proclaim God's righteousness? Do you hide His righteousness in your heart? Do you conceal God's love and truth? Are you a silent Christian? Does your inner

man rejoice in God's law? Every Christian makes known the wonders of God's love through His Son Jesus. It is in this same vein of David's delight with the law that Paul, too, cries out: "in my inner being I delight in God's law" (**Romans 7:22**). Where is your delight? Where is your happiness? Where is your enjoyment? Is it in Christian ministry? Is it in the Word of God? Is your life in harmony with the law of God? Or is your life out of harmony with the law of God? Where are you? How do you stand? How do you measure up to God's standard? The first chapter in the book of Psalms sets forth the distinction between the godly and the ungodly. Which section of this Psalm do you fall into—godly or ungodly? This psalm is one that every Christian should memorize. Listen to the Holy Spirit:

- ¹ Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
- ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
- ⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
- ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- ⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish (**Psalms 1:1-6**).

Since God clothed us with His righteousness, are we devoting ourselves to God? Are we consecrating ourselves to prayer? Are we dedicating ourselves to ministry? Paul concludes his letter to the Colossians with these words: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (**Colossians 4:2-4**). Again, I ask, are you praying for the advancement of God's kingdom? Are you also proclaiming the message of redemption? In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:9-10**).

Are we guilty of not working out this amazing salvation God has given us with fear and trembling? No, we do not work with "fear and trembling" in the sense of losing our salvation. But rather, this working is in the spirit of awe. In other words, the believer with humility and holy reverence works out his salvation; it is a holy vigilance and circumspection. The Christian constantly offers up a sacrifice of praise. Remember the words of the Hebrew writer:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share

with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased ([Hebrews 13:15-16](#)).

With every believer, it is, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" ([Psalms 40:8](#)). Just as David could not seal his lips ([Psalms 40:10](#)) about God's righteousness, God's faithfulness, God's salvation, or God's love, so, too, every Christian shares the "good news" of God's righteousness made available through faith in His Son Jesus. Jesus is God's righteousness to us and for us. We cannot seal our lips about God's righteousness through faith in Jesus to all who believe. Paul sets forth this righteousness from God in rapturous language to the Romans:

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus ([Romans 3:22-26](#)).

Jesus is God's faithfulness. It is in Jesus that one finds hope. It is in Jesus that one discovers security. We cannot seal our lips about God's faithfulness. Paul writes,

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord ([Romans 8:38-39](#)).

In Romans, chapter 5, Paul speaks of freedom from the "wrath" of God through Jesus our Lord. He goes right to the heart of salvation. It is not in man, but it is in Jesus. We cannot seal our lips about freedom from God's wrath in Jesus. We cannot seal our lips about God's reconciliation in Jesus. Jesus is God's salvation for lost humanity:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation ([Romans 5:9-11](#)).

Thus, like David, when we think of Him, we do not seal our lips; nor do we cease to do his will. In closing this message, I remind you of the words of the Hebrew writer:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever ([Hebrews 13:20-21](#)).

**Message Delivered
at theFollowing
Congretations**

**Oakwood Hills Church of Christ
DeFuniak Springs, FL
November 15, 1998
11 am**